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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1534
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3585
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2976
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 001006

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT BAKIYEV VISITS MANAS TRANSIT CENTER AND
PRAISES ITS OPERATIONS

REF: (A) BISHKEK 986 (B) BISHKEK 381

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Classified By: DCM Larry L. Memmott, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On September 11, President Bakiyev visited the Transit Center to participate in a memorial ceremony. A happy and healthy-looking President gave a short speech lauding the new Transit Center, a symbol of Kyrgyzstan's continued willingness to contribute to international efforts in Afghanistan, and promoting the "Bishkek Initiative," the idea that Bishkek could be the site for conferences on Afghanistan and regional stability efforts. He toured the Transit Center, accompanied by the Ambassador and Transit Center Director, joking at times with them and with his delegation. The President was highly complementary of U.S. efforts at the Transit Center, especially its humanitarian assistance projects. President Bakiyev urged the Transit Center director to start construction of the new ramp as soon as possible. President Bakiyev's visit to the Transit Center is another sign of a major shift in the GOKG attitude toward the U.S. END SUMMARY

12. (U) On September 11, President Bakiyev, accompanied by the Ambassador and Transit Center Director, participated in a memorial ceremony and toured the Transit Center. A happy and healthy looking President walked through several sections of the Transit Center, joking at times, and also toured the Manas air traffic control tower. The President's delegation included Foreign Minister Kadyrbek Sarbayev, Minister of Defense Baktybek Kaliyev, Minister of Transportation Nurlan Sulaimanov, and Governor of Chui Oblast Bolotkan Kumarov. Representatives of the local diplomatic community, base contractors, and abundant local media representatives also attended. This was the President's first visit to the Manas Transit Center, although he visited the Air Base to take part in a similar ceremony in 2006.

PRESIDENT PRAISES TRANSIT CENTER AND KYRGYZ SUPPORT

13. (C) At the memorial ceremony, Bakiyev gave a speech

highlighting Kyrgyzstan's contributions to security in Afghanistan. The President drew a line between the past contributions of the former Air Base, and the new contributions of the Transit Center, which he noted had only begun operating two months ago. Mentioning the "Transit Center" six times in the course of his short remarks, he said that the new agreement shows Kyrgyzstan's continued willingness to contribute to international efforts in Afghanistan. Bakiyev also raised the idea that Kyrgyzstan could be the site for a standing peace conference for Afghanistan and regional stability efforts, known as the "Bishkek Initiative." He said that Kyrgyzstan proposes "to arrange a meeting of opposing parties in Bishkek under the UN umbrella."

14. (U) Accompanied by the Wing Commander and Ambassador, the President's entourage then viewed a series of story boards highlighting the Center's mission of moving people, fuel and cargo. The story boards emphasized several of the base's humanitarian efforts, such as the reconstruction of Birdik School (Ref B). The President was highly complementary of U.S. efforts at the Transit Center, especially the numerous humanitarian assistance projects. He said that the U.S. was doing "positive things" and he was pleased with the changes at the Transit Center. President Bakiyev also met and talked with Kyrgyz workers, and urged them to work closely with the Americans and teach them about Kyrgyz customs and traditions.

SPARKS AT THE TOWER

15. (C) Bakiyev stopped at the air traffic control tower to view the entire airport, including the Transit Center and

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land which has been returned to the GOKG by the USG. Manas International Airport president Bakyt Sydykov told President Bakiyev that the airport planned to build a second runway on the returned land, but that the Governor of the Chui Oblast, Bolotkan Kumarov, had given the land to his friends. The Governor responded, obviously surprised and embarrassed, that a Decree had been signed by the Prime Minister giving his Oblast the land.

16. (C) The President exploded, yelling that he wanted to modernize the airport and obtain ICAO certification and, with U.S. assistance, turn the current airport into a international cargo transit hub. He turned to the group and said that the Decree did not matter - he would instruct Prime Minister Chudinov to annul it. The President then questioned the Chui Governor, rhetorically asking why people would want to have land at the airport, especially since everyone complained about the airport's pollution, noise and the dumping of fuel by American planes.

17. (C) This entire back-and-forth and Presidential on-the-spot decision-making was caught by the press on video. Bakiyev then turned on the cameramen themselves, shouting at them to back off from the Ambassador who, he yelled, was being crushed as they attempted to get a good angle on Bakiyev's own outburst.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS GET A RAISE

18. (C) The drama continued at the President's next stop when air traffic controllers appealed to him for higher salaries. Like a good factory foreman, the President quizzed the air traffic controllers on their work schedule, salaries and other details of their employment. After turning to leave, the President ordered the airport president to increase the controllers' salaries by 30 to 40 percent beginning in January 2010. The President added that if the Americans can pay more for the Transit Center, "we can pay more too."

START RAMP PROJECT

¶9. (C) At the end of his tour of the tower, President Bakiyev urged the Transit Center director to start construction of the new ramp as soon as possible in order to move the U.S. aircraft away from the civilian sections of the airport. He asked the civil aviation officials why the ramp project had not started sooner. The airport president responded that he could not get permission from the government to approve the ramp project.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) The events in the air traffic control tower highlight the helter-skelter manner in which the government makes policy decisions. There appears to be little or no internal dialogue on policy issues. While the President's political instincts seem to be as sharp as his tongue, it seems that important but mundane issues such as a second runway for the airport or the pay scale for air traffic controllers depends on his direct engagement which, in this case, was the result of an essentially unrelated September 11 ceremony.

¶11. (C) Bakiyev was clearly satisfied with his visit to the Transit Center and with its "new" operations. His visit is another sign of the substantial improvement in Kyrgyz-U.S. relations over the past few months.

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